

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Linking Iowa's Freight Transportation System program

**1. Is a copy of the materials presented on the webinar available?**

*Answer:* Yes. The material from the webinar is available on the [LIFTS program website](#). In addition, the answers to the questions asked during the webinar have been incorporated in these FAQs.

**2. How do you define a public, private and public-private partnership for the LIFTS program?**

*Answer:* A private applicant would be any “for profit” organization. A public applicant would be a governmental subdivision or affiliated organization that is publically funded (i.e., city, county, metropolitan planning organization, etc.) A public-private partnership would be a partnership of a government organization and one or more private sector companies. Both the public and private entities would need to contribute toward the match to be considered a public-private partnership.

**3. How is this program different from the Railroad Revolving Loan and Grant (RRLG) program?**

*Answer:* The RRLG program is specifically limited to railroad infrastructure. The LIFTS program has a wider eligibility of costs and can be related to any mode of transportation (rail, truck, aviation, barge, etc.) or the facilities that link them. LIFTS funding is broader based with the goal to improve the freight transportation system and provide benefits to highway users.

**4. What does it mean to “provide benefits to highway users”?**

*Answer:* When a non-highway mode of transportation increases their efficiency or volume there are typically benefits to highway users. For example, when more freight is diverted to railcars or barges, which are safer and more efficient modes, there is less highway congestion, fewer emissions, less risk or damages from accidents, less wear and tear on the highway system – all of which benefit the highway user. Depending on the project and its location, there may be other ways in which the highway user benefits on a local or regional basis.

**5. Highway only projects typically eligible for local, state or federal highway funding are not eligible costs under LIFTS. Can you explain and give some examples?**

*Answer:* The purpose of the LIFTS program is to provide flexible funding for freight projects that don't have a traditional funding source available. Many projects that benefit freight transportation are eligible to be programed with public highway funding. Because a funding source for those already exists, they are not eligible as stand-alone projects under LIFTS. Examples of *ineligible* costs would be adding turn lanes, highway reinforcement or rehabilitation to better accommodate heavy trucks, widening a turn radius, eliminating height or width restrictions of a bridge, truck parking or traffic control systems.

Within an eligible project there may be roadway related or paving costs that are eligible under LIFTS if they are an integral part of a project. Examples of eligible costs would be entrances or exits to a transload facility, paved areas to store freight out-of-doors, parking areas within a freight facility, or paved staging areas for freight transfer.

Some projects that include highway components may be able to take advantage of another Iowa DOT program, [Revitalize Iowa's Sound Economy \(RISE\) program](#) (through a separate application process), for the establishment, construction, improvement, and maintenance of roads and streets to promote economic development in Iowa.

**6. Can I apply for LIFTS funding to supplement an existing project that has already received RRLG funding?**

*Answer:* Yes, if the LIFTS application is for a new or different phase of a project that has previously received RRLG funding.

**7. If I have a loan through the RRLG program, or a private loan, can I apply to LIFTS for a grant to pay off that loan?**

*Answer:* No, the LIFTS program is expected to stimulate new development. Refinancing of a completed project even if it would have otherwise qualified under this program is an ineligible cost.

**8. Are there environmental review requirements or other red tape associated with LIFT funds?**

*Answer:* If awarded LIFTS funds, a legal agreement will be required between the project sponsor and the department to delineate responsibilities for project design, right of way acquisition, contracting, construction and materials inspection; documentation required for reimbursement of project costs; audit requirements; and maintenance of the completed project.

A project is expected to meet all zoning, permitting or other normal requirements for a project that did not receive funding. LIFTS projects will not be subject to the federal-aid highway development process, which means that there are no *additional* environmental, historical, cultural, or other surveys, reports, or reviews associated with federal funding.

**9. Is there a Buy America requirement?**

*Answer:* Though supporting American manufacturers and suppliers is encouraged, federal Buy America requirements do not apply to projects funded under LIFTS.

**10. Can two or more private companies partner to submit an application?**

*Answer:* Yes. Partnerships, whether between private or public and private entities are encouraged.

**11. Is it helpful to have letters of support for a proposed project?**

*Answer:* Though not technically required, letters of support from local stakeholders and/or government officials speaking to support or readiness for the proposed project may be helpful as the project is evaluated. However, if the project depends upon a transportation provider, such as a railroad, to serve the facility, a letter confirming the willingness to serve the project is required.

**12. Can the funding be used for planning studies? What types?**

*Answer:* Yes. Planning studies are eligible if the goal of the study is to evaluate the need or feasibility of a freight facility or improvement or to develop a strategy to address a freight transportation challenge. Eligible planning studies are expected to lead toward a freight transportation solution or provide input into the wisdom or design concepts of a possible future freight investment (even if the recommendation of the planning study is to not move forward with the investment.) Planning studies simply to gather data, establish a marketing plan for an existing facility or that do not lead to a recommendation are likely to be ineligible or expected to score poorly in the evaluation process.

**13. I see that equipment that is integral to a freight transportation improvement is an eligible cost. Can you explain?**

*Answer:* Equipment, such as that used to transfer freight from one mode to another, is an eligible expense. The agreement between the department and any awardees will include a requirement for on-going maintenance of the project. Any equipment included as part of the grant, whether mobile or fixed equipment must remain with the project for the duration of that maintenance period.

**14. Our city is considering forming a Municipal Port Authority. Can the City transfer a successful grant to its Municipal Port Authority prior to completion of the project?**

*Answer:* No. The applicant would be responsible for the project throughout its completion if awarded a grant. Grantees must sign an agreement that spells out the terms of the grant, including on-going maintenance of the project. Upon completion, a transfer could be made if the new owner takes on responsibility for the on-going maintenance.

**15. Can these funds be used in addition to the Railroad Revolving Loan & Grant program?**

*Answer:* Yes, if the LIFTS application is for a new or different phase of a project that has previously received RRLG funding. LIFTS grant funds cannot be used to pay off an existing RRLG loan.

**16. What do you expect the awarded project sizes will be?**

*Answer:* There is no minimum or maximum award size pre-determined. The awards will be made based on the evaluation criteria.

- 17. If a warehouse or some other business that uses a lot of trucking is located downtown in a metro area, and they would like to relocate to the edge of town near a highway, would those relocation expenses be eligible?**

*Answer:* It depends. This is a program designed to support infrastructure. If a new or previously used facility near the edge of town must be built or renovated, that project would be eligible. However, the expenses to relocate operations (non-facility related), would not be eligible. All projects will be rated on the evaluation criteria. Refer to the eligible costs included on the [LIFTS program website](#).

- 18. Is there a maximum amount that can be granted to a specific project**

*Answer:* No.

- 19. Would replacement of a weight restricted or fracture-critical highway bridge be eligible?**

*Answer:* No. A highway bridge could be programmed under existing federal, state, or local highway funding. Though replacement would benefit freight, the LIFTS program is designed to assist those freight projects that involve other modes which do not have a funding source or a funding source that is severely limited.

- 20. Assuming multiple projects qualify in total exceeding the \$2.6M, how will the money be split up among the applicants?**

*Answer:* There is no pre-determined methodology. The evaluation team will review the project benefits and readiness and develop a recommendation based on that review. It is possible that not all applicants will be awarded the full amount of their request, but only if a lesser award does not endanger completion of the project. Grant funds will not be split between all eligible projects if the total requested exceeds the amount available.

- 21. Is a private industry eligible if they want to construct a rail spur to deliver product that is currently delivered via trucks as long as a public benefit is demonstrated?**

*Answer:* Yes

- 22. Has there been a demonstrated need from shippers for intermodal rail service in Iowa?**

*Answer:* There has definitely been the need expressed for more multimodal freight options for shippers, i.e., transload and/or intermodal facilities. Iowa's Freight Advisory Council identified the need for more multimodal connections as one of seven options for improved freight movement in Iowa.

- 23. Does a state map exist of current intermodal points? Will the scoring team rank a site higher if it is not near another intermodal site?**

*Answer:* The [Iowa Rail Toolkit](#) contains a list of the transload and intermodal sites that were identified when the Toolkit was developed. Distance from another site is not a standalone criterion. However, a site that is farther from an existing site is likely to be able to show greater benefits, thus increasing its evaluation.

**24. Is the Rail Tool Kit that shows the Iowa intermodal hubs on the IDOT website?**

*Answer:* The Rail Toolkit can be found on the Office of Rail Transportation's website at <http://www.iowadot.gov/iowarail/railroads/industry/iowarailtoolkit.html>

**25. Is there a limit on submissions from a single entity?**

*Answer:* No. Each project submission must be submitted in a separate application.

**26. Would flood protections for a rail yard be eligible? The rail yard is in a floodplain of a major river, which extends across a public street and into some adjacent commercial areas.**

*Answer:* Yes. Flood protections would be eligible, but must show a benefit to the highway user and public benefits.

**27. You mentioned this was a demonstration round of funding. Will there be additional rounds?**

*Answer:* That depends. The Iowa DOT has for several years unsuccessfully sought to obtain a flexible, sustainable source of state funding to meet multimodal and freight needs. This demonstration project will provide evidence of the needs and demand to support future investments.

**28. Is private infrastructure costs such as rail, rail switches, pipe racking system (to take product from rail car to building) eligible?**

*Answer:* Yes. To be eligible, the project would have to demonstrate benefits to highway users.

**29. Would any funds be available for marketing a new rail facility?**

*Answer:* No. The LIFTS program is designed to encourage new or upgraded infrastructure to benefit freight transportation. Marketing costs are not an eligible expense.

**Are there restrictions on what can be used for a match?** *Answer:* There are no restrictions on matching funds. Any matching funds must be committed by the applicant.

**30. I know you mentioned planning and feasibility studies are eligible but are design and engineering?**

*Answer:* Design and engineering costs are not eligible as a stand-alone cost, but are eligible if a part of a construction award under this program.

**31. Will there be guidance available from IDOT between now and application submission?**

*Answer:* Hopefully, these FAQ's provide additional information to guide you; however, questions are always welcome. All questions about the program or the application should be directed to [Laura Hutzell](#) by e-mail or call 515-239-1066.

Please note these answers are based on the best available information at the time. Answers may be subject to change as this new program is further developed.